letters to juno

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letters to juno

by yikelliot

Summary

there is a thief who planet hops more than he sleeps and cycles through more names than a dark matters agent. with every new mark, he writes a letter. while addressed to no one but himself, they remind him of the role he is meant to play.

all that is thrown out of a window belonging to the office of juno steel. the thief never writes more than one letter to a single mark, but finds himself breaking more than just that rule upon meeting the surly detective.

Notes

in a lot of ways, this feels like my first ever fic. of course, it isn't – i've written a few others before. but letters to juno has been my baby since around november last year. while it isn't made up of many words, a Lot of work has gone into this.

though not nearly as much work as was done by the incredible mods of the bang! thank you to them for being considerate and kind, for always answering questions, and for being so passionate about fanworks.

i'm also thanking my amazing beta, rey. they were so enthusiastic and helpful, and their comments always made my day!

my artist pine, who is so incredibly talented. thank you for taking a chance on my work. also to necro, who had to drop out, but did some beautiful sketches while he was still in it.

lastly, to my mutuals danny and reubs. danny and i decided to join the bang together and they've been such a motivating force to me these last few months. reubs is always there to give me the most flattering, incredible analyses of my work. i appreciate you both dearly.

please check out pine's incredible art for this fic. e have also worked incredibly hard on this and are definitely worth checking out! pinefriend.carrd.co

this is the longest pre-work note i've ever written, so thank you for sticking around. without further ado, please enjoy letters to juno.

See the end of the work for more notes

i: cause you don’t trust what you don’t know

Chapter Notes

chapter title from the song “us” by tiny deaths!

The thief with no name had a lighter in the right-hand pocket of his coat. He did not smoke – not anymore, at least – but he kept it there all the same.

The lighter in his pocket was a comforting weight as the thief prepared his mask. Though he was still youthful in face, he took great care in his application. Several minutes were spent pondering over twelve similar shades of purple shimmer, another thirty on blending just the right amount of contour into his already sculpted cheekbones.

To an outsider – anyone at all, for that matter – the thief would have looked anything but anxious. However, frazzled he was.

His current employer left an onerous feeling in his gut. The pieces that made up Miasma fit together in an unsettlingly distorted picture: a funhouse mirror stretching a swollen limb or all of your belongings being shifted ever-so-slightly to the left. Something was instinctively wrong with Miasma: something that made all the thief’s synapses fire at once. He felt a fear that pointed to unavoidable danger – the sort of peril that led to the world’s end, or something similar.

With all of these fears reaching a rolling boil inside of him, it was remarkable that the thief’s mask did not slip. It did not ripple with the disruptions, nor did his expression twist with discomfort. His face remained reserved, calm – his hand placing down his last brush dependable as ever. He had completed daunting jobs with ease before, he reminded himself.

His hands were steady while holding his brushes and kohl pencils, yet somehow even steadier once he picked up a pen. Writing created the peace the thief needed to succeed. And so, he began to write to his next mark.

Detective Juno Steel,

I pride myself on being invisible, untraceable. The day I resolved to become the formidable agent who you will undoubtedly delight in meeting was the day I gave up my tangibility. The very core of a Dark Matters agent is one’s

efficient anonymity, though I think you'll find that I am more than just a sharp suit with a disposable nametag.

That being said, I am very good at what I do; I can, in fact, disappear in a puff of fog. For this reason, I would usually advise that you not get too attached, darling detective. But then, where exactly is fun in that? For you, I plan to be anything but forgettable. Naturally, I'll still leave Mars once the job is through, but if I'm half as good as I know I am, I would've been on your mind long after my departure. I must convey my deepest sympathies to the lost souls on Mars who will never benefit from your expertise. Such a pity to have to destroy pretty, useful things such as yourself; such comes with my line of work, I'm afraid.

I must say that you, my dear, possess an aura that is anything but subtle. I doubt that there's a single person on Mars who shines as brightly as you do, and that's not just because of the headlines you attract like honey once did to bees. The tabloids love a scandal and you seem to have the word plastered on that handsome, brooding face. A mighty past, too, it seems. I think I'll enjoy opening you up and seeing just what lurks beneath that adorable scowl.

Still, duty does call. I know that you do not believe in spectres or demons: that the things that go bump in the night aren't even on your top 50 list of concerns. But I'm inclined to think that you do listen to ghost stories. The sort of tales where a man disappears as quickly as he arrives, leaving nothing but unease in his wake.

I am that ghost story, Detective. I will help you solve the crime that has you so captivatingly disgruntled whilst simultaneously committing one that will rock your world more than you could possibly imagine. You will find that catching me is like trying to catch smoke.

I suppose that I am exactly like a ghost in spite of my corporeal form. I imagine that like my ethereal counterparts, I will be as mysterious as I am haunting. I plan to rob you blind and have you smiling for it. I plan to leave a pale handprint on the surface that is your psyche without any print to trace.

Because while I am a ghost, I am also a king. And a king, my dearest Detective, answers to no one but his own selfish whims and forces beyond our realm. Do not underestimate my divine power. Do not underestimate my defiance of such a realm. I am bound to no laws, no moral code. I look forward to disrupting yours.

Until we finally meet, I'll be watching you.

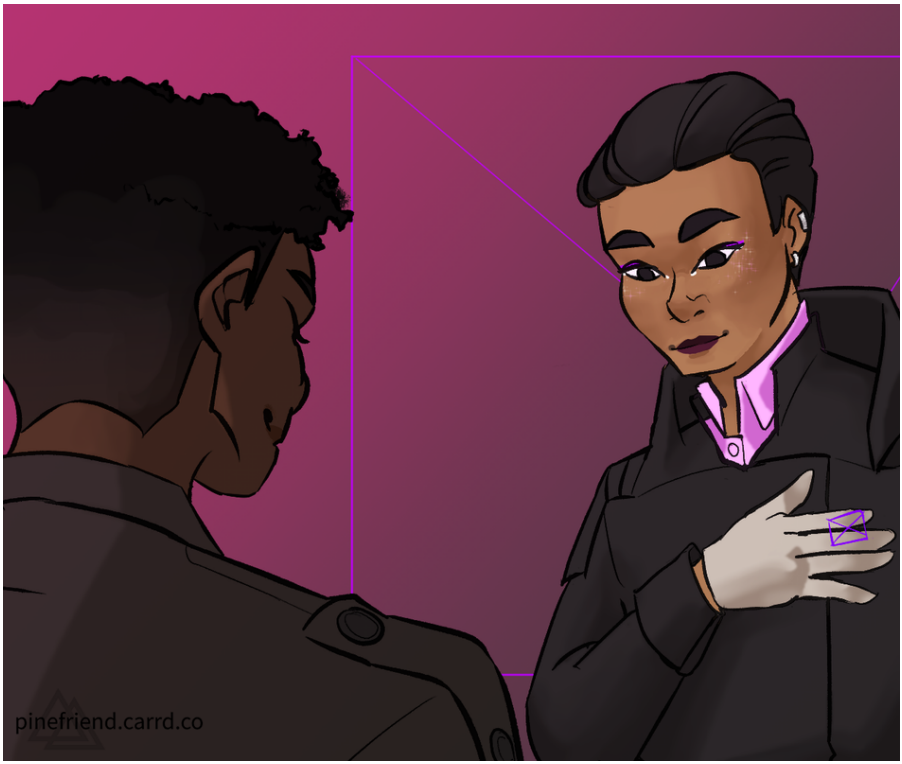
Yours,
Agent Rex Glass

There was a certain stupor that blanketed the thief whenever he wrote one of his letters. He had compartmentalisation down to a science, but could never quite stop himself from getting slightly lost in the mask he was wearing.

That being said, he never wrote his letters as himself. The exercise was to become a new person with each stroke of his pen. Looking back at the letter he had just written, the thief remembered the advice of the man who fathered his thievery: every costume needs a cover. Mag had believed that it was simply not enough to change your appearance: you had to speak like a completely different entity. Following his own advice, he had made his protegé write a letter to his first real mark and from then on, writing had become as easy as throwing on an outfit.

As much as he occasionally would've liked to, the thief didn't keep the letters. The risk of one falling into the wrong hands was too high for the bitter reward of nostalgia; the risk and, of course, the fact that there were some jobs that the thief clamoured to forget. Some letters were certainly easier to get rid of than others.

This time, though, the thief folded the letter impossibly small and slipped it into a hidden compartment in his coat. He didn't quite know why, but he felt the need to hold onto it for a while.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ii: lately i am in over my head

Chapter Notes

chapter title from the song “distance” by art school girlfriend!

What exactly Peter Nureyev was playing at, no one could tell. To say that he had never felt quite this exhilarated would be an understatement. Juno Steel, the detective with a moral compass a mile high and a smile a lightyear wide, if you knew how to coax one out of him. Those lips could cause quite the earthquake.

Peter had memorised three different smiles on his detective: the first being an infuriatingly yet endearingly smug smirk. Juno was good at his job and knew it too. The slight upwards quirk of his mouth was incredibly distracting – so much so that Peter had forgotten his discretion when interfering with the doors in the Kanagawa mansion. A completely rookie mistake – what sort of a master thief allowed himself to be distracted by a pair of sparkly eyes?

And if Peter had thought those eyes were captivating back then, he would’ve died hiding in the corridors from the cameramen. Charming as ever, Rex Glass had made a quip that prompted a grin so wide and a laugh so bright that it reminded him of looking into the sun. He blamed his racing heart on his adrenaline and certainly didn’t file such a sight away for future consideration.

The third smile was one that Peter couldn’t avoid thinking of, despite his best efforts. The small, maddening curl of just-kissed lips made his knees weak just thinking of it. That kiss – more electrifying than anything he’d ever experienced– was born from the need to take more than just a key to a safe and, oh, did that make Peter’s heart sink. It was toe-curling, yet possessed a tender cosiness that wracked him with guilt. How could he have taken from a man who had smiled like that? Who had given him the gift of his kiss so willingly?

Suffice to say, everything had gone wrong.

It was to be a quick stabbing. Nothing too fancy or showy, just enough to get the job done, with plenty of time to escape before the joke that is Mars’ law enforcement arrived. Juno Steel was not supposed to live, let alone be given the key to Peter’s unravelling – to his past. The once nameless thief was now playing an incredibly dangerous game.

Yet there he lay, sprawling and gangly limbs spread languidly on soft garnet sheets. He had unmasked hours ago, save for his lipstain. Ridiculous as it may have been, he didn't want to erase the lingering impression of Juno's lips just yet. His thumb ran back and forth across his bottom lip, tracing the plump skin that had found Juno's.

That kiss. The taste of harsh Martian whiskey still lingered on Peter's tongue, but the tingling that came from that all-too-short press of lips had long ago worn off. It took every ounce of restraint Peter had not to grab the back of his neck and devour him. Something had awoken in Peter, then – a longing, aching urge to consume Juno as much as to explore him. He had no grounds to call it professional curiosity or keen rivalry; this was nothing short of unabridled hunger.

Peter recalled his apprehension towards this job before it commenced. That nervous dread hadn't dissipated, instead melding with his giddiness and amalgamating into nausea. He felt a familiar pressure on his rapid heart beat that he attempted to pay no heed.

Peter Nureyev, masked or otherwise, needed his calm, his steadiness. For this, he always kept a pen in one of his pockets. He took the pad used for notes by the hotel comms and sat down at the desk in the corner of the room. Instantly, the excitable thrum of his skin began to wane and a beat of stillness washed over him. He needed a contingency plan, but more than that, he needed to distance himself from these feelings – if at all possible.

It was then, having long overstayed on that wretched, dusty planet, Peter Nureyev wrote to his muse.

Juno,

You must forgive me for my previous arrogance. I am not a man of impulsivity or flights of fancy, as I have never been afforded such an opportunity. In the effort to maintain any sort of mystique, one must sacrifice his spontaneous urges. I have failed to honour that very simple rule – all because of you, my dear.

I mention arrogance because I genuinely believed that I would best you at the game you play ridiculously well. I knew you to be a master detective but less so a seductress, although perhaps that is my own mind compensating for my egregious errors these past few days.

You have awoken something in me that I had forgotten laid dormant. A thief can only steal so many diamonds before feeling like he is simply going through the motions. A partner always poses unknown and often unwanted

variables, but they always make things so much more interesting. For the first time in a long while, I felt the thrill of the chase again. I do hope you meant what you said about wanting to run away together. We'd be a force to be reckoned with; I'm sure of it.

But these imaginings only serve to distract a thief such as myself from his purpose. I will eagerly await your next move, but if that move is silence, I will be forced to forget my little fantasy. Still, the point stands. If I'm half as good as I once believed, I hope you're at least considering it. What a feat it would be, to rid the famous Juno Steel of his morals: to convince him to skip planets and steal stars, never once being caught.

Of course, you'll never receive this letter. I will dispose of this scrap of senseless dreamings and with it the hope that you will return my affections, if only to save myself the trouble. Despite myself, though, I do hope we meet again. We could rock the whole universe, if you'd like.

Yours,
Peter Nureyev

The letter was short, much to Peter's dismay, but his entrancement could only last so long when his brain still felt like it was on fire.

Moving quickly, he flopped back onto his bed – not at all making a high-pitched giggle as he went. No, the lover was composed as always; his mask certainly did not fissure down the centre.

And if he tucked this new letter into the pocket of his coat, too, nobody had to know.

iii: you've been dancing on your own too long

Chapter Notes

chapter title from the song "thin" by aquilo!

Juno frantically rifled through Nureyev's coat. He wanted – no, needed desperately – to know the man behind the many masks. In fact, Juno wouldn't have been surprised if he found a few masks amongst all that junk.

After fishing out a bag of nondescript snacks that would've made even Rita shudder, Juno's hand closed around a piece of paper, folded haphazardly and far too many times. Upon first glance, the ink appeared smudged and illegible. Illegible until Juno pried the folded pages apart. The handwriting, while slightly blurry, was undoubtedly Nureyev's: a neat and elegant script that glared right back at Juno.

Juno. Juno's name was on the page. Why was Juno's name on the page?

His eyes darted to what he assumed was the beginning of the apparent letter. Frantically, Juno began to read.

The gambler destroyed his letters for this very reason. They were almost as important as his name in terms of secrecy, and he did all that he could to keep them private.

The door to the room clicked open, Juno too enraptured with his stolen literature to notice. The gambler did realise, however, and all at once his face went pale – a stark contrast against his floral suit.

«Just what do you think you're doing, darling?»

The gambler, true to his name, was playing a very dangerous game at present – one that could jeopardise their entire cover. He had never planned to take an icy tone with his… husband. But all semblances of role play had been thrown out the window along with his privacy. Whether he cared to admit it or not, the man behind the floral suit cared deeply about his process and the thought of anyone else seeing into his innermost thoughts was stomach-churning. It was understandable that his crystal composure cracked ever so slightly beneath that sort of pressure.

«I-I was just–»

«Just what exactly, Ju-Dahlia? Going through my private things so you could sell me out? Root out my weaknesses?»

«No. I wasn't going to do that.» Juno's voice was surprisingly firm, even in high tensions. It was always a pride of his that despite all the fucked up things his brain made him do, he managed to maintain his speech.

It made the gambler furious.

«You don't sound very convincing. How on Mars can I be expected to put my faith in you, put my life on the line for you when you clearly trust me as far as you can throw?»

«If you want me to trust you, you actually need to talk to me, Duke!» Somewhere in the back of the gambler's mind it registered that they were really being rather loud.

«Really, Dahlia? You're going to pin this gross intrusion on me, somehow?»

«Oh, don't give me that bullshit! You've been nothing but secrets since the day I met you. Give me one good reason not to walk right now.»

That was it, wasn't it? Juno hadn't asked about Brahma or about Mag, which meant he hadn't gone deep diving into the gambler's history like he should have done. The thief that came before him had lied and stolen from the lady that stood in front of him, brows furrowed rather distractingly.

The gambler, like many of his predecessors, did not trust much. They were sticklers for the rules, no matter how care-free and frivolous they may have seemed. Ever since the reappearance of Peter Nureyev, the masks the man had been wearing had been looser, more prone to damage. Sloppiness, conscious choices to leave damning evidence out in the open for who-knows to find: these were not actions of the thief with no name. These were actions of a fool.

Still, Juno stood there simmering. As much as the gambler disliked to admit it, he did have a point. Many of his previous marks had balked at his unwillingness to open up – share his soul, as it were. But he couldn't possibly indulge them like he had Juno. Couldn't he see how much more he gave to him?

With that question, realisation came crashing in: Juno had no clue. The gambler was similar enough to the others, just as the thief had been before: they did not share. He felt foolish once more – a common occurrence around his detective, it seemed. How could he expect Juno to know how much he trusts him if he hadn't told him? He wasn't a mind-reader.

Letting out a long sigh, the gambler took a tentative step towards Juno, hands outstretched.

«I can't.»

Juno flinched at that. It was criminal that he was so attractive, really: especially when he got like this. His lips slightly parted and brow crumpled. He looked like he'd never spoken in his life in that moment, and the gambler relished in it for a second. To stump Juno Steel was a rare affair that his companion wasn't willing to let go.

«What, is there something on my face? Quit staring at me already.» Juno huffed more than he breathed these days, not that the other minded in the slightest. A scowl had morphed from Juno's previous frown and before he knew it, the gambler had reached up with a manicured finger and smoothed out the lines of his forehead.

«Frowning gives you wrinkles, you know. Terrible for the complexion.»

Juno, though he'd never admit it, was rendered speechless. A little puff of an exhale escaped his still parted lips in what seemed like an involuntary sigh. His next words were soft.

«I'll keep that in mind, Nureyev.»

Peter made a noise of disapproval, then.

«Duke, darling. Do your best not to forget it, won't you?» He tried not to let any indication of anxiety push through his mask. Here, in the form of dizzyingly handsome and petulant detective, was the man who held his past – and perhaps more quietly, his future – in his slightly trembling hands. The gambler hoped this trust wouldn't go to waste.

The hand that had settled Juno's frown lines had found a home cupping his cheek. Juno's skin warmed to a lovely flushed red under the other's palm as he became readily aware of just how stifling the room was.

«A bit on the nose, making us husbands and all.» Juno murmured after what seemed like an age, eliciting a small laugh from his fabled spouse.

«I'm afraid I don't know what you mean,» he laughed, inching forward until their chests were so close they touched on their synchronised inhale.

The man with many names loved this game they played with each other: the back-and-forth, the feigned ignorance. Like a dance, the ever-hopeful and usually-banished part of his brain called out. But it was true: loving Juno Steel was a lot like a dance.

And oh, what a revelation.

The gambler, in that very instant, had fallen very much in love with this lady. With his guarded heart but open face: with his dry wit, sharp mind.

The gambler, as he played today, was married to Dahlia Rose. They had a loving, if somewhat overly-passionate, marriage. Unlike most roles he played, however, the gambler had not written his mark a letter. He felt sufficiently underprepared.

That is, until both of Juno—Dahlia's hands cupped his face. Until he muttered, «you know exactly what I mean,» under his breath and kissed him with such tenderness that it swallowed the gambler whole. He stood there until his brain caught up with his body, his free hand grabbing the scarlet lapel of Juno's suit jacket.

He remembered his hands on Juno before: reaching into his pocket, fishing out a key. There was nothing to find now, and without the distraction the gambler felt his resolve melt around the edges. If he let out a low groan, it was no longer to distract. The display of smoke and mirrors, the constant misdirection and trickery for once bowed out to the whim of Peter Nureyev's lust.

He had no idea what to do with himself.

Juno did. Somehow, despite all his preparedness and piles of contingencies, the gambler had forgotten the sheer importance of good timekeeping. Perhaps that explained the noise of confusion he made when Juno began to pull away.

His detective chuckled as the taller man couldn't stop his face from surging forward, desperately and unthinkingly trying to reconnect

their lips.

«Easy there, Duke. We have a job to do, remember?»

And he was just right. The gambler had felt strangely unprepared walking into this job hand-in-hand with the man now stood – decidedly ruffled – before him. Now, the missing pieces of his mask were slotted comfortably into place. He could play the part of a dashing, thrill-seeking, love-sick husband.

And if he didn't feel like he was acting much at all, no one had to know.

iv: i want him but we're not right

Chapter Notes

chapter title from the song "smother" by daughter!

Juno Steel was restless even in sleep: ever a furrow in his brow, scarred shoulders tensed. The detective was a coiled spring ready to shoot towards the necessary direction at a moment's notice, even when such action resulted in his own detriment.

Peter Nureyev watched as Juno, copper skin tarnished with dark blood, slept fitfully. Bad dreams, he knew. Juno was a man who scarcely indulged in silent slumber, and his unconscious screams were far more haunting than those of his own waking nightmares. They had been in the tomb for months. Days, hours, mere minutes. It didn't matter, really. Time didn't pass as it was supposed to in a place like this. It coated your skin and squeezed until you didn't know up from down – moments from aeons.

Gazing down at Juno now, Nureyev felt an aeon slip by. For how long would he have this man, this almost ethereal being who seemed to glow in the dankness of their cell? When Nureyev finally calculated their way out of this mess, how long would it take for his femme fatale to sprint off into the horizon and never look back?

Thoughts like this scared the protector. It corroded every nerve of his intricate defensive matrix, a gridlocked system years in the making. The thief he once was did not fear such losses. He wouldn't have even considered it a loss. Alliances, sentiments, feelings. All of these poisons trickled until careful planning spilled into crushing failure. The thief he used to be did not have time for love or the fear of letting go.

Yet the protector sat on the frigid rock floor, looking at another man with enough affection and fear and hope in his eyes to get him killed thrice over. Such a fragile moment. The seconds stretched on for lifetimes, but he knew that for however long he stared, observed, drank him in, it would never last quite long enough. There were always things to forget about a face: a microexpression missed, a freckle uncounted. He could die loving Juno Steel and never have seen enough.

Even so, such thoughts couldn't have come close to stopping the

protector from taking his lady's hand – from stroking his back and whispering to him through the darkness of the room.

«You know my past now, Juno. You know that two failed revolutionaries died when New Kinshasa did not fall. I only wish I could have told you myself.

«Here's what my memories couldn't have possibly told you: I trust you more than anyone I've ever met.»

The protector laughed at that.

«But I've told you that, haven't I? In a dingy casino bathroom, all the while you believed that I would truly bet on your life. I can't say that it was the most romantic situation, but I meant it as much then as I do now. After being on two mere cases with you, you have somehow unraveled more of me than anyone I've crossed paths with. You're incredible for that alone.»

The man who monologued was vehemently not sniffing.

«It kills me how little you will let me help. Forgive me for being selfish a moment, dear, but it's been on my mind since you tried to crawl out a window and into a lion's den. While I credit our rather skillful escape almost entirely to you, I would hate to think of what may have become of the darling detective were I not there to—»

A small, hiccuping sob interrupted him for a moment. His ribs ached with a bruised hunger as he tried woefully to calm himself.

«To assist you. Is it pathetic to be completely unable to imagine a happy life without you, Juno? To feel utter despair at the thought of you never again smiling because of me?

«And there I go again. Sounding ridiculously selfish, as if the pleasure of your company isn't enough. It is more than enough, I assure you. Sometimes I scarcely believe that you aren't a figment of my imagination. Were dreams real, you, my dear, would have me sleeping through day and night in the slim and desperate hope of catching a mere glimpse of you. Please believe that. I need you to believe that.»

The protector was only vaguely aware that his speech was almost incoherent. Pain-hazed and half heartbroken, it was hard for him to keep track of his metaphors as he waxed poetic to the sleeping lady who shared his cell.

Despite his less-than-lucid state, his words were almost entirely reflective of his sober thoughts. Terror had gripped him these past days, but the torture came second to the fear of letting Juno go.

The protector curled up beside his everything, and tried desperately not to think of the days to come.

v: we'll be just fine

Chapter Notes

chapter title from the song "west" by sleeping at last!

Sunrises were often bright on Mars. Of course, in the desert there was nowhere to escape the sun's harsh rays. But in this, a clean, quiet, and sharp-smelling hospital room, there was hardly a faint glow.

The disciple lay unconscious, slumped in a plastic chair, mere inches away from his goddess. Though he was then asleep, he had seldom caught any rest in the days gone by. How could he, when Juno's breathing was so fragile, so tentative? If it weren't for his immense exhaustion, his black-smudged eyes would've been wide, trained on the sleeping form in bed, his ears ever-aware of the steady beeping of the heart monitor.

Though weak as it was, the creeping light caused the disciple to stir in his rigid sleep. His body tensed as soon as he became aware of himself, muscles crying out with the motion. Slowly, he rolled back his shoulders, his neck, his ankles. A cool consciousness settled over his features as he once again fixed his gaze upon Juno.

Another pain made itself apparent in his chest. The disciple had learnt not to flinch for fear of harsher punishment, yet now found himself impotent to the impulse. Further smudging his eyeliner, he furiously swiped at his face, ridding it of the treacherous tears. His chest heaved, despite his best efforts to remain calm, as the man in the chair folded in on himself.

The sun was decidedly higher in the sky when the disciple woke again. The IV next to Juno's bed looked fuller. Just how long had his nap lasted?

He kicked himself for this. Juno was fighting for his life, after almost sacrificing himself to save the entire planet – not that they deserved it. His voice had shaken in that tomb with Miasma. He was terrified of it – of death and the pain in the meantime. Yet he fought off the tentacles, wise-cracking as if it was banal.

The disciple's chest gave another protest. The way Juno spoke, self-sacrifice did indeed seem like a regular pastime. How could someone that bright, that brilliant and clever be so ready to throw it all away?

For people that certainly didn't deserve it?

Juno had been ready to die. He had said his goodbyes and had fought until what he thought was the end of his life. And his disciple slept at his bedside as if he had the right.

The man in the chair felt bile creep higher with every passing thought. His fingers itched for a pen, or perhaps to berate his body as well as his mind. Thankfully, the writing utensil found him first.

Reaching into his coat, slung over the back of the chair, the disciple pulled out a somewhat crumpled lined sheet of paper. It would have to do.

My Juno,

How did I let this happen? How is it that I left that tomb unscathed while you were forced to bear the brunt? This was my mess to begin with.

I never meant for this to happen, I swear it. Yes, I always felt that something about this job was wrong, but I beg of you to believe me when I say that this was far worse than anything I could have ever predicted. You were never supposed to get hurt.

I remember how small and fragile you looked in our cell after however long they had taken to torture us that day. What I felt back then is nothing compared to the aching terror I feel now, seeing you here in that wretched bed. I'm so lost, Juno. I don't know how to save you.

Even still, I'm glad beyond words that you're still with me here. That whatever it was that killed Miasma didn't deal you the same fate. I don't know what I would've done with myself if that hadn't been the case. If the last glimpse of you I had was that determined, damned stubborn face that chose my life over yours. How could you ever think that my existence could measure up? In your light, I am not even a spark. I am hardly a pebble next to your mountain.

And now you lay in rubble, in a hospital gown that looks tragically pale and almost consumes you. You were made for brilliant fabrics and breathtaking dresses, my love. It is profoundly wrong to see you like this; it feels like an intrusion.

Just thinking about it, I realise that you wouldn't want me to think that. I can almost hear you huffing at me for even mentioning it. But it's true, Juno. I bared all my secrets to you and yet it still feels like I have to leap over hurdles to learn the tiniest smidge of your story. Perhaps it is because I

am undeserving of hearing it. Perhaps it is because you think you are undeserving of telling it.

But none of that matters now, my dearest. As soon as you're awake and no longer in pain, we can go wherever we please and take as much time as we need. You'll be able to tell me your deepest, innermost thoughts under a view of stars you could only dream of. We'll be free to laugh at private jokes as we hop star systems like the puniest moon rocks. A bright future, Juno. The brightest, now that I have you.

Yet, there is a nagging voice. A horrible, wretched thing that croaks in the back of my head when I imagine such adventures. It tells me that you are not mine to keep. That you belong amongst the worthy, where you can truly shine at your brightest. Truth be told, I don't think there's anyone quite worthy enough of your company: myself included. I'll never be able to thank every star who convinced you that I am.

But that same voice lingers still. Will I really have you at my side when you wake, or will you already be lightyears away from me and my foolish fantasies? Are you dreaming of better things already, Juno? I wouldn't blame you. I couldn't blame you. After what I've put you through, I would balk at anyone who chose to stay. But you have, haven't you?

I'll spend every day trying to make up for what I've caused. I may not be much, but I'd like to think that one day, I could give you the universe. A vast smattering of gorgeous planets and breathtaking stars as your own personal playground. If that's what it takes for you to stay, I'll start working this very minute.

The disciple's frantic writing was interrupted by a coughing to his right. His pen clattered to the ground as he rushed to Juno's bedside.

Even with Juno looking as destroyed as he did, the disciple's breath was knocked out of him as his lover awoke. He definitely didn't look his best: half his head wrapped in thick, white gauze, bruises littering his neck and collarbones – not the pretty, decorative ones that the other ached to leave. These were large, discoloured patches that bore too much resemblance to holes through the lady himself.

His disciple shuddered to think about the broken ribs, the shattered tailbone that was swathed in blankets just inches away.

At the very least, the hospital provided good care. Olympus Mons was significantly cleaner than Hyperion, and the people far friendlier. The city itself still had its fair share of horrors, considering not one person batted an eyelid at the extensive injuries Juno had. Not when a

haggard man had dragged him into the emergency wing, more unhinged than he'd felt in decades. Juno was whisked to surgery for his eye and had been in a medical coma for four days.

Those four excruciating days were up.

«Is that a blaster in your pocket, or are you just happy to see me, Nureyev?»

He let out a sob at that, all but throwing himself onto Juno's bed-ridden form. The latter let out a wheeze, but wrapped his arms around the taller man all the same. The disciple, Nureyev, having come to his senses, unwound the tight coil of his arms around Juno but, grabbing his hands, Juno pulled them right back around him.

The two laid there, straining their ears – desperate to hear each other's steady breath after weeks of fighting for their lives. Nureyev's body trembled slightly as he clung tightly to his goddess, his everything. Juno's bruised hands wove their way into his hair, stroking it as he whispered affirmation into the crying man's ear.

«It's alright. We're here. I'm here. We're safe now. It's okay.»

Neither man knew how long they laid there, wrapped in one another, struggling to believe in each other's survival. At some point, Nureyev had climbed into the space next to Juno on the surprisingly soft bed. The two no longer spoke, and a soft silence blanketed the room.

«Where to now?» Juno asked after a while. The break in their peaceful atmosphere made Nureyev jump slightly.

«Anywhere you want,» Nureyev replied.

The sense of dread he had once felt as the thief with no name hadn't completely dissipated. He supposed that seeing Juno in such a state would still rattle his senses. But Miasma was gone, meaning Nureyev and his lady were free to do as they liked.

Weren't they?

vi: all that i'm left with are memories

Chapter Notes

chapter title from the song "1216" by echos

Waking up alone was a terrible thing. The man laid bare in a strange hotel room had never been a particularly heavy sleeper; as a thief in constant danger, he never could. But being wrapped up in affection and promises of a blindingly brilliant future had knocked him out colder than any sleeping pills he had ever tried.

The room was eerily silent, but not cold. Detective Steel had been kind enough to tuck the now slackened sheets around his fool as he escaped his clutches. Small mercies, the fool supposed.

Courtesy was a cruel concept to the bitter man that morning. His blood boiled in anger, but his shivering exposed his desolation. This man had never felt like an idiot before, and didn't quite care for the taste of it.

The thief who had been robbed did not know what to do with himself in the harsh Martian sunlight. With each lost, damaged, or cracked mask, he had forgotten unexpected angles to plan for, scenarios to avoid. Despite all his internal warnings blaring at full volume inside his head, he had not considered this.

It only made sense to do what he had always done. To return to his masks seemed alien now, against the new modus operandi that he had newly fashioned for himself – no, for Juno. But without the man who held his name, his past, his identity, he had nothing left of his former self. Peter Nureyev and his moronic ilk had failed the thief time and time again.

As he had always done and always would do, the thief picked up a pen and began to write a letter.

This time, though, his hand shook terribly.

Juno.

I once called you an impossible idiot and I am truly sorry for that. The real idiot, the true fool, is the shell I will stare back at in the mirror every day from now on. My idiocy was not in trusting you, although that certainly

did not come from a place of reason. No, my complete stupidity was in believing anyone would stay after seeing what you have seen. After watching who I was and who I now am.

I am sickeningly underwhelming but more than that, I am a failure. From ever since I can remember I have been running and stealing. Stealing not to spread wealth to the helpless but to satisfy vulturine employers and my own hedonism. Running from the last promise Peter Nureyev made to the world.

The last promise before you, that is.

I always suspected that you would never trust me. After all, how could the brightest star in the galaxy place himself in the hands of a man who has only ever held a candle? How could such a small and broken thing deliver the universe to a goddess?

I was never good enough for you. My name, the most precious thing to me before you came along, was never good enough for you. I should have expected this. I blame myself more than anyone for not seeing it sooner.

I wish you well. I hope that whatever intangible thing you left me to pursue brings you a joy that I will never have. I know that you'll do good things, Detective Steel.

You have done yourself a service in ridding of me. You would have been miserable with the fragmented man I am and will most likely continue to be. I commend this rare moment of self-preservation from you despite the fatal blow it dealt to me.

Above all else, thank you.

Thank you for reminding me that I am alone in this world. That I so truly deserve to live in solitude. It is a valuable lesson that I will not be forgetting anytime soon.

The thief did not sign the letter. It was for no one but himself, after all. It wasn't as if there was anyone who cared enough to read such senseless ramblings.

He folded the page once, then thrice more before gently sliding it into the left breast pocket of his coat. His hand lingered within the fabric before he shook his head, retracting his hand and pulling the paper back out along with it.

The thief with no name had a lighter in the right-hand pocket of his coat. He did not smoke – not anymore, at least – but he kept it there

all the same.

Just a few clicks and the last letter to Detective Juno Steel was alight. The fool with no name, who claimed to seldom cry, once again found himself wracked with sorrow. Long body hunched over the small blaze of his own design, he fished out three identical crumples of paper and fed them to the flames. As he watched his letters burn away, he couldn't quite stop his sobs.

If a detective observing the scene were to have listened closely, he would perhaps have heard the occasional hiss of a tear in the small fire that had cremated the fool's heart. Alas, there was no one there but the fool who had lost his name.

Now, there was only smoke.

End Notes

thank you so much for reading. like i said, so much effort went into this fic, so please consider leaving a kudos. comments are even more appreciated, so scream down there with me!

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!